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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 000322

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/24/2019  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [PINR](#) [UN](#) [CE](#)  
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: FOREIGN MINISTER EXPRESSES GSL  
DISCOMFORT OVER UNSC BRIEFING

REF: A. COLOMBO 320  
[1](#)B. COLOMBO 307

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In a March 23 meeting, the Foreign Minister questioned why the U.S. was supporting a briefing to the United Nations Security Council on the fighting in northern Sri Lanka. Ambassador stressed that continued shelling of civilians in the safe zone was a major concern of the United States. Congressional and public concern with the conduct of both sides in the conflict, combined with continued shelling of the safe zone had pushed the USG to support the UNSC briefing, Ambassador explained. End Summary.

FM Questions Need for a UNSC Briefing  
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[1](#)2. (C) In a March 23 meeting, Foreign Minister Rohita Bogollagama questioned Ambassador about why the U.S. was openly supporting a briefing on the humanitarian situation in northern Sri Lanka before the United Nations Security Council. Bogollagama mused, "we could have given you a briefing, why do you need to go to New York for that?" The Foreign Minister's prodding reflects clear GSL discomfort with any added scrutiny to the conflict by the U.N. The Foreign Minister returned to arguments he made on March 18 (ref B) suggesting that civilian casualties were in fact LTTE cadres in civilian clothes and claiming that the military was not firing on the safe zone.

Ambassador Stresses Civilian  
Shelling Still a Problem  
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[1](#)3. (C) In response, Ambassador recalled that the U.S. had been very balanced in its public stance to date. We had not called for a "ceasefire" (a term the GSL strongly opposes) and had been openly critical of the LTTE, publicly calling on the Tigers to negotiate the terms of their surrender with the Government. The Ambassador then recalled his and others in the international community's efforts over the past two months. He credited the government for allowing food to reach the safe zone, but highlighted that until recently (ref A) getting medicine in had proven difficult. The area where substantial improvement had not been achieved was in the continued shelling of civilians. When Bogollagama repeated

his claims that the GSL was not shelling into the safe zone, Ambassador replied that that was "simply not true."

Ambassador Explains High Level of  
Interest in Sri Lanka in the U.S.  
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¶4. (C) Ambassador went on to outline for the Foreign Minister the high level of attention the conflict in Sri Lanka was generating in Congress, the NGO community and among the American public. Explaining that the USG needed to be responsive to its own citizens, Ambassador described the flood of e-mails he and others within the Department receive on a daily basis urging the U.S. to act to end the violence. This pressure, combined with the poor record the military has had protecting civilian lives its self-declared safe zones, had pushed the USG to support a UNSC briefing. Ambassador explained that a UNSC briefing was useful because it would get the attention of the GSL, which our repeated private exhortations had failed to do. When pressed by the Foreign Minister, who insisted that the Diaspora was "not separate" from the LTTE, Ambassador stated clearly that if the government opted for sustained end to shelling of civilians there would be less pressure for a UNSC briefing.

FM Asks for More Information on  
PACOM Humanitarian Assistance  
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¶5. (C) The Foreign Minister also asked for more information that could inform an official GSL request for PACOM humanitarian assistance along the lines of the Indian-supplied field hospital in Pulmoddai. Embassy subsequently provided that information to the Foreign Ministry, but has not yet received a formal request.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Bogollagama's focus on our public support for a UNSC briefing reflects the GSL's strong desire to keep the conflict out of the Security Council. The GSL's wish to avoid such a move provides the international community with some leverage through which to urge better conduct by the military. Shelling continued today. The Embassy continues to support a UNSC briefing.

BLAKE